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STATEMENT OF
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Mr. Chairman:

Three dramatic events have recast the seemingly moribund Middle East diplomacy and opened the way for a major American diplomatic initiative: the reelection of President Bush, the death of Yasser Arafat, and the commitment of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to withdraw from Gaza and dismantle Jewish settlements there.

Successful diplomacy represents a merger of necessity with opportunity. During Bush's first term there were many appeals from both sides of the Atlantic for American initiatives to start a peace process. But the conditions for success did not exist. So long as Arafat was president of the Palestinian Authority, his refusal to renounce terrorism, his encouragement of suicide bombings, and his corrupt and chaotic leadership doomed meaningful negotiation. And Arafat's blighting presence, combined with the pressures of jihadism, prevented moderate Arab states from playing a helpful role.

In Israel, Sharon had come to power, more than doubling the seats in parliament of his conservative Likud Party, on the basis of a program that rejected the proposal made at Camp David by his predecessor, Ehud Barak, to return more than 90 percent of the West Bank to Palestinian rule. Sharon insisted, as a precondition to any negotiation, on an end to the intifada.

European leaders appealed for a more active U.S. role, but on behalf of an unfulfillable program: return of Israel to the 1967 frontiers; partition of Jerusalem; abandonment of settlements beyond the 1967 line; and some symbolic return of refugees guaranteed by some kind of international force, (NATO or the United Nations-all this in return for no tangible quid pro quo other than a formal acceptance of Israel's right to existence, a point generally taken for granted in diplomacy. No Israeli leader-even the most dovish-has ever considered as compatible with Israel's security a return to the cease-fire line of a war that ended over a half-century ago. Nor have Palestinian leaders ever unambiguously accepted the legitimacy of Israel in any borders.

The abandonment of all settlements ran counter to the entire history of the Jewish state, while the idea of a security guarantee by outside forces provided no assurances. If Israeli armed forces, with their own families at risk, are not able to secure Israel's frontiers, no international contingent is apt to do so. More likely, such a contingent would become hostage to terrorist blackmail, as has happened in Iraq, or become a screen behind which terrorist groups could plan attacks without fear of preemption.

The Bush administration's refusal to expend U.S. diplomatic capital on a doomed enterprise has contributed to bringing matters to a point where a confluence of interests of all moderate forces might initiate a breakthrough. Israel's leaders realize that President Bush will not knowingly risk Israel's security-the psychological precondition for a U.S. initiative. At the same time, the Israeli political scene has been transformed. By offering the return of Gaza to Arab rule and the dismantling of the Jewish settlements there, Sharon has opened the possibility of a new approach based on a partition of Palestine between a Jewish and an Arab state substantially reflecting demographic reality.

Some reject this interpretation of Sharon's policies, asserting that the surrender of Gaza is only a tactic to solidify Israel's hold on the West Bank. But Sharon surely knows that he will not be able to maintain U.S. support if he undermines Bush's repeated commitment to bring about a Palestinian state during his presidency. This requires a territorial compromise.

Sharon has acted on this premise. At the price of losing his Likud majority and governing with a minority coalition, he has taken the crucial step of abandoning all settlements in Gaza and four on the West Bank, marking a revolutionary departure in Israeli policy. He has also established a security fence between Israeli and Palestinian territory, defining a dividing line that provides its own security without the need of a shaky international presence. It also permits a distinction between those settlements close to the 1967 line and protected by the security fence-mostly around Jerusalem-and those not essential to Israel's security.

Among the Palestinians, Arafat's death removes a figure who viewed the peace process as at best a tactical pause in a struggle to eventually remove what he considered the illegitimate Israeli presence. A new Palestinian leadership freed of the Arafat incubus has

an opportunity to create transparent governance, affirm coexistence with Israel and renounce terrorist tactics, thereby removing major obstacles to an overall agreement.

These obstacles are immense. Gaza is riven by factions. Hamas is a major force for violence; the military units of the Palestinian Authority have been cooperating with the militants. Corruption and lawlessness are endemic. If the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza leads to a collapse of authority, the resulting chaos could destroy all hopes for progress. The Palestinians have an obligation to produce a responsible, transparent leadership and to abandon reliance on terrorism. They seem to have taken important steps in this direction.

Both sides of the Atlantic are beginning to recognize that constant friction is against their fundamental interests. Key European allies, unable or unwilling to generate either the public support or the conviction to associate themselves with the military effort in Iraq, understand the importance of making at least some of the American objectives their own (including political and economic reconstruction efforts in Iraq). Appealing to radical Arab trends guarantees a stalemate and, by keeping open the Palestinian wound, undermines the position of all moderates threatened by fundamentalists and radical jihadists. For his part, President Bush appears receptive to rebuilding the traditional partnership with Europe.

The challenge of a new approach to Middle East policy will be to meld divergent strands into a coherent and compatible whole: the policies of Israel; a moderate Palestinian evolution; relations with friendly Arab states; relations with important players such as our European allies, Russia, and, ultimately, even China and India; and the Iraq war. In Bush's first term, these issues were handled individually; the second term presents an opportunity to develop an integrated strategy for bringing about a coalition of moderates for peace. Such a policy needs to be put forward with a strong affirmation of positive purposes, not defensively as a means to ease difficulties.

This presupposes farsighted policies by all concerned. Israel cannot be asked to accept as a neighbor a state dedicated to its eradication. It has every right to demand the acceptance of genuine coexistence and the disavowal of the apparatus of terrorism before it agrees to move tens of thousands of its settlers from the West Bank. But it should take steps to ease the psychological and political pressures of occupation. The United States, Europe and Israel should undertake some confidence-building measures to encourage the

Palestinians toward a stable, terrorism-free regime by easing the conditions of life on the West Bank and, if asked, extending technical assistance to its governance.

Moderate Arab regimes can help the process by legitimizing the Palestinian measures necessary for the coexistence of two states. The summit between Mahmoud Abbas and Ariel Sharon is a hopeful step in merging these trends.

We have come to the end of the step-by-step process. There are not enough peripheral issues left that might satisfy the parties even partially. Heretofore, road maps have been negotiable only if phrased in language so general and ambiguous as to permit each of the parties to interpret it in the manner most closely approximating their position. This time a more precise and specific road map should guide the peace process.

The recent trends in Israel, Palestine and the United States permit some specificity, with respect to territory and to Palestinian obligations. The territorial dividing line should be defined by a security fence paralleling the 1967 borders along principles discussed at Camp David and other meetings.

In compensation, Israel would transfer some of its current territory to the Palestinian state. Israeli settlements located beyond the dividing line would be subject to Palestinian jurisdiction, which would probably imply their abandonment. Finally, such a concept should include provisions for the establishment and support of an interim government in Gaza for the time between the withdrawal of Israeli forces and the conclusion of negotiations. The Palestinian contribution to peace must be a genuine recognition of Israel, transparent institutions and a dismantling of the terrorist apparatus on Palestinian territory or aimed at Israel from other neighboring states.

We should have no illusions. No approach that preserves Israel will pacify radical Arabs or those Palestinians who view negotiations as an interim step on the road to eradication of Israel. Aspects of a new plan will be bitterly resisted by some in Israel, however much implied in current Israeli policy. It will not solve our dilemmas in Iraq or end hostility to America in the Middle East. But strong U.S. leadership could give moderate leaders in the region the incentive and justification to overcome a policy that dooms the region to another generation of struggle and death.

It could provide a vision for the future of the Middle East compatible with the dignity of all parties and our own conscience. It could show a path that combines our friendship with Israel, concern for the views of our allies, and the stake all moderates have in enabling the Islamic world to play a major role not as a scourge but in a manner compatible with its own great traditions.